

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Role of Self-Efficacy in Self-Leadership

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Abstract:

This paper explains the role of self-efficacy in addressing the deficiencies in self-leadership using theories of leadership, principles of management and self-leadership. This paper adopted a qualitative approach using secondary sources as a method of collecting data. The research found out that people with low self-efficacy maintain a negative self-evaluation to gain a sense of control over themselves, their emotions and maintain low levels of distress and existential anxiety as explained in the cognitive experiential self-theory. It was also found that people with deficiencies in self-leadership need to build their self-acceptance through reading articles on self-leadership, working closely with mentors, be in relationships with people who will accept them the way they are and leveraging their spirituality. The most influential factor influencing self-efficacy was found to be personal performance accomplishments. Proposals for developing self-efficacy were identified as mastery of experiences, social persuasion, social modelling and psychological responses. This paper is not exhaustive and is left open for further research.

Keywords: Leadership, self-efficacy, self-leadership

1. Introduction

This paper defines the concepts of self-efficacy and self-leadership and gives examples of how people integrate self-efficacy in self-leadership to achieve organizational goals in leadership.

1.1. Leadership, Self-Leadership and Self-Efficacy

Leadership according to Northouse (2015) is a process of influencing others to achieve a goal. There are several factors that determine the level of success in achieving these goals and most of the factors have something to do with the qualities the leader possesses. One of the qualities that has been associated with the leader's confidence is self-efficacy which is the cornerstone of leadership (Bandura, 1997; Stevenson, 2015). According to Stevenson (2015 "A leader that is technically qualified for the position but lacks the confidence generated by self-efficacy, will find it difficult to lead others" (para. 2). In addition, Stevenson (2015) argues that self-confidence comes from a life-long process of developing the sense of an internal authority of who you are.

Self-leadership is the ability to lead yourself towards achieving outcomes and goals you set for yourself and your business (Derek, 2016). Since leadership is all about influence, it is important for a leader to manage himself or herself in order to manage others. In business, leaders have relationships with partners and clients. Leaders get chances to influence their followers when they manage themselves well (Northouse, 2015). Likewise, a leader in a position of responsibility in an organization can easily lead followers if he or she is leading by example and by being a good role model to be emulated (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matterson, 2013). Leaders who wish to exercise and practice these ideals should identify their natural abilities as outlined in the great man and traits theories, and also do self-evaluation in terms of skills learnt over a period of time following the proposal in the skills approach theory (Northouse, 2010). The attainment of goals will not only depend on these abilities but other factors as well.

One such factor is the situation in which the leader operates. A leader may possess the right qualities to lead an organization but after successfully getting the job through a competitive process, some fear of the unknown may set in. At that point, the leader begins to ask himself questions like, "what happens if I fail to deliver as per the expectations set during the interview?", "How will the situation be if I fail?", "What will happen to my future profession?". The leader in such a scenario lacks self-efficacy.

2. The Role of Self-Efficacy in Self-Leadership

Self-efficacy is a belief in one's abilities to establish and perform according to a set of responsibilities in a place of work or in any other situation (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy can have an impact on everything from psychological state

through behavior to motivation (Bandura,1997). The text that was extracted from the Holy Bible may shade some light and effectively bring out the concept of self-efficacy: The new international version (NIV) Holy Bible states:

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good, I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this, I keep on doing. (Romans 7:18-19, NIV 1984)

This text describes someone with low self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997; cited in Stevenson, 2015), people in this situation avoid challenging tasks, believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities, focus on personal failings, negative outcomes and quickly lose confidence in personal abilities. Why did the person described in Romans 8:18-19 maintain negative self-evaluation?

The cognitive experiential self-theory proposes that people have a need to maintain a coherent self-view (Stevenson, 2015). According to Bandura (1995), "Low efficacy beliefs undermine motivation, generate negative affect, and impair cognitive functioning" (p.165). Coherent self-view is not about low self-efficacy but reflecting back on one's weaknesses which assist in planning for the next cause of action. Negative self-evaluation helps one to control emotions (Bandura, 1977). What then should one who finds himself or herself in such a situation do to come out of it?

In the Holy Bible, it is stated that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV 1984). From the Christian point of view, those who find themselves in such situations need to repent, confess their sins and get saved. The Bible explains that those who do as instructed in the scripture will be saved, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, RSV 1971). The enthusiasm with which a saved person (Christian faith) carries out Christian activities (e.g. singing, preaching) demonstrate high self-efficacy.

From leadership and management theories, self-acceptance is one way of dealing with low self-efficacy. Being accepted by others as we are, opens the door for us to begin to accept ourselves (Rogers, 1951). Some people struggle to maintain order and perfect their performance through training and practice (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). This makes it hard for those struggling with low self-acceptance. Yin (2015) advises any one in such a struggle to take the following steps to enhance self-acceptance: (1) spend time in a relationship with healthy people who accept you as the person you are; (2) minimize your contact with the opposite kind of people; (3) work with a coach or counselor specifically on this goal; (4) do some reading in self-acceptance texts; and (4) leverage your spirituality. Once self- acceptance is actualized, self-efficacy is achieved. The following extract from the Holy Bible illustrates the concept of self-efficacy and portrays someone with an elevated level of self-efficacy.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NIV 1984).

The extract talks about a race involving competitors and one person getting the ultimate prize. Bandura (1997) noted that efficacious individuals are motivated, persistent, goal-directed, resilient, and clear thinkers under pressure. Efficacious people are people with high self-efficacy who exude a lot of self-confidence in carrying out a given assignment because they believe they have the capacity to do it. The person described in the biblical text has the confidence that after running the race he or she will get the prize. This means he or she will be the winner- offering leadership in the race.

Leadership is about influence, it is about goals, relationships, situations, processes, groups and the individual (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matterson, 2013; Northouse, 2015). The behavioral theories of leadership clearly state that good leaders have six basic qualities or traits of behavior which are: Honesty and integrity, emotional maturity, motivation, confidence, cognitive ability and achievement drive (Northouse, 2010). When the person described above says "I do not run aimlessly", it means he or she has a goal to guide him or herself. Self-leadership is the ability to influence self and bring out the very best of who we are and who we can be (Northouse, 2015).

Not running aimlessly implies the person has a plan in place. Winning does not come easily but through strategy (Hughes, Beatty, & Dinwiddle, 2014). In the Kenyan context, A serious athlete who wants to win will put a plan in place which may involve rigorous training until the standards are attained. The athlete perseveres chilly weather, runs through rough terrains and tough conditions in the training camps which make him or her break world records, earn gold medals and huge sums of money as the ultimate prize. Such a people will always have their self-esteem boosted by that world class recognition which in turn boosts the self-efficacy of many followers, no wonder many have joined training camps to train and learn from the role models. Bandura noted that by observing new skills and strategies in others, people enhance their task capabilities (Bandura, 1997). This is one way to improve self-efficacy.

The most influential factor of self-efficacy is personal performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1997). This can actually be seen when an athlete running a 42km race breaks the world record immediately after crossing the finish line. The way he or she celebrates the achievement tells it all. Some take to their knees with their hands together thanking God, while some decide to dance and carry their country's flag around the track showing the level of self-efficacy at its peak. Bandura (1997) argues that succeeding in a challenging activity provides the strongest information for changing efficacy beliefs. Also, positive feedback or the encouragement from a credible person such as a coach, a mentor, a teacher, or a parent improves self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Feedback gives confidence to the mentee that his or her effort is being recognized.

The other factor that elevates self-efficacy is physiological condition and mood states. The better one feels physically and emotionally, the more efficacious one will feel (Bandura, 1997). The happier you are when performing a task, the more you are likely to perform better. Contrary to this statement, it is true that when you are nervous before you deliver a speech in public, you are likely to perform poorly. It is wise therefore to control and manage your moods before performing a task.

Bandura (1997) describes people with high self-efficacy as those who: see difficulties as responsibilities to be learnt and not to be evaded, nature profound curiosity in the tasks in which they perform, perform the activities with passion and withstand any turbulence that may come their way in form of impediments and distresses. When a leader encounters new experiences which are challenging in nature, he or she should repeatedly carry out the procedures of sorting them out until he or she masters and puts everything in control (Bandura, 1997). A leader occasionally deserves appreciation from the employer after performing well. Some organizations actualize this by organizing annual appraisals and identifying the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the year, where one is given an award for excellent performance according to the defined categories. The CEO who gets such a recognition influences not only his or her followers to perform better but also his or her colleagues in different industries which Bandura calls social modeling.

The CEO should replicate this by identifying people in the company who provide meritorious service and through appraisals can also be rewarded. It is not only the tangible rewards that can boost the self-efficacy of the employees or followers in general but verbal appreciation works too (Bandura, 1997). A leader in a position of responsibility can persuade employees to believe that they have the skills and abilities to succeed. Inspiring and encouraging people when they performed builds their self-confidence which propels them to deliver beyond their expectations. Giving feedback with comments to improve performance and providing the support in terms of training to eliminate deficiencies in another way of boosting self-efficacy of the employees.

3. Conclusion

People with deficiencies in self-leadership need to build their self-acceptance through reading articles on the same topic, working closely with a mentor, being in relationship with people who will accept them the way they are and leveraging their spirituality. In addition, self-efficacy has a lot of bearing on self-leadership that needs to be developed through mastery of experiences, social persuasion, social modeling and psychological responses (Bandura, 1997).

4. References

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